

10. A NOTE ON THE SURVEY OF THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD  
(*CHORIOTIS NIGRICEPS*)

Shri R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji, Regional Honorary Secretary (West) of the Indian Board for Wildlife, Member of the Maharashtra State Wildlife Advisory Board, and Member of the Working Group of World Bustards, was keen that we should survey the habitat of the Great Indian Bustard (*Choriotis nigriceps*) in Marathwada region, with a view to afford stricter protection to this rare bird, which is alarmingly on the decline and to promote conditions for its breeding and multiplication. The likely habitat of this bird, was indicated as the area in the vicinity of the confluence of the rivers Godavari and Pravara, known as the Pravarasangam, about 40 km to the south-west of Aurangabad district, on its border with the adjoining Ahmednagar district. Another probable site suggested, was the area near about the confluence of the rivers Godavari and Purna, about 20 km to the south of Purna in Parbhani district. The Divisional Forest Officers concerned, as also the field-staff, were given description the bird and were asked to keep an eye on its occurrence and movement and to report no sooner than it was sighted.

Local enquiry revealed that nearly two decades ago this bird was seen in fair numbers, in the grassland interspersed with cultivation between Vaijapur and Gangapur, along the river Godavari on the south-western border of Aurangabad district. The other likely areas indicated were: Shiur 50 km to the north-west of Aurangabad on the Malegaon road, Nimgaon-Chaoba in the eastern part of Ashti taluka, in Beed district, bordering Ahmednagar district, Chausala, 35 km to the south of Beed in Beed district, and near about Ruibhar and Tuljapur in Osmanabad district.

We had been in quest for the bird for nearly a year when on 28-9-1978 accompanied by Shri K. K. Chavan, Divisional Forest Officer, Aurangabad. I undertook a rapid survey, of the tract between Vaijapur and Gangapur along the river Godavari. After a brief halt at Gangapur, we proceeded southwards to Pravarasangam (the confluence of rivers Godavari and Pravara) and crossed over into Newasa taluka, of Ahmednagar district, to the other bank of the river Godavari. Enquiry about the bird, with the local villagers near Pravarasangam, drew a blank. We found there was no access by road, along the river Godavari on the other side of the Pravarasangam. We therefore thought of returning and surveying the fringe, on the other side of river Godavari in Aurangabad district. As we were proceeding along this course, we met some villagers near Pravarasangam, who were hacking, *Prosopis juliflora* (Mesquite), which has wildly overrun the low-lying tract, near the confluence of the above rivers for fuelwood. Enquiry with them, gave us a ray of hope, as one of them said, that he had seen this bird two years ago, in bajra fields near his hamlet, at Babulkheda, in Newasa taluka, in Ahmednagar district. He described the bird, vividly and offered to take us to the site.

It was incredible, that almost on our arrival I could sight two bustards foraging for food, on the edge of a bajra field about a hectare in extent. On two sides of the field, were small patches of grassland, admeasuring barely 2 ha. dotted with shrubby growth of ber (*Zizyphus jujuba*) and hivar (*Acacia leucophloea*). The birds were about 150 m away from us. We tried to approach them on foot, to have a closer glimpse and we succeeded in getting

within a distance of about 30 m from them. The birds which had strayed into the bajra field perfectly camouflaged with the crop. We could spot another pair, in all four birds. Two were smaller than the others, leading to infer, they were a pair each, male and female. As we got closer to them we could clearly see their majestic, almost martial stride, with their conspicuous black-crested crowns, swivelling right and left, looking out warily for the intruder. As we got closer to them, within a range of about 30 m they took off in the air, almost instinctively, flapping their wings rhythmically.

Though the common vernacular name of the bird is 'maldhok', it is locally known as: "kaldhok" or "kuldhokmane". The villagers informed us, that Babulkhedha fields and grasslands are permanent habitat of the birds and

that they are also come across in the neighbouring villages of Salbatpur, and Jalka. They estimate a population of about ten birds in this tract.

The natural habitat of the bird, is very much disturbed with cultivation perniciously making inroads into grasslands and the shrubby vegetal growth being cleared in the process. Continual human traffic too, as a result of the spread of cultivation all round, also comes in the way of safe and sheltered habitat for the birds. The fringe of grassland interspersed with cultivation and shrubby growth, on either side of the river Godavari between Vaijapur and Salbatpur (about 1500 sq. km.) both in Aurangabad and Ahmednagar districts, could be considered for protection and development, as available habitat for the vanishing Great Indian Bustard in Maharashtra.

CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS,  
AURANGABAD CIRCLE,  
AURANGABAD, (M.S.),  
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# 11. ON THE TAXONOMIC VALIDITY OF THE SOUTH INDIAN BLACKHEADED ORIOLE, *ORIOULUS XANTHORNUUS* *MADERASPATANUS* FRANKLIN (AVES: ORIOLIDAE)

(With a text-figure)

During the course of a faunistic survey in Andhra Pradesh in 1978, I collected a female specimen of *Oriolus xanthornus maderaspatanus* Franklin on 22 February from Kotapalli, c 48 km north-east of Mancherial, Adilabad district, Andhra Pradesh. Its measurements are: Length 144, tail 87, and bill 30 mm.

The south Indian population of the Black-headed Oriole was separated from *Oriolus xanthornus xanthornus* Linnaeus, 1758, as *Oriolus xanthornus maderaspatanus* by Frank-

lin, 1831, on the basis of yellow markings on inner secondaries and tertiaries being reduced to terminal spots. Baker (1926) considers the whole population of Indian Blackheaded Oriole under one subspecies, *Oriolus xanthornus xanthornus*. Biswas (1947) also treated *maderaspatanus* as a synonym of *xanthornus*, since he found that the yellow markings are very variable and not a constant character. Rand & Fleming (1957) while studying the birds from Nepal, commented that the